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CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN WORKERS AGAINST GERMAN REARMAMENT

Leipzig, 22-24 April 1955

At the Seventh Session of the General Council of the WFTU, held in Warsaw 9-14 December 1954, Benoit FRACHON, Secretary General of the French CGT, called upon the WFTU to organize a conference of workers of the countries of Europe. Such a conference would meet under the slogans of the struggle against the remilitarization of West Germany, the struggle for peace, and for the improvement of living conditions of the working masses in capitalist countries.

Louis SAILLANT, Secretary General of the WFTU, proposed that the General Council adopt this motion and authorize the Secretariat to make preparations for such a conference.

Nevertheless, the published resolutions of the General Council meeting failed to show that the FRACHON proposal had been adopted. The omission of the FRACHON proposal from the published resolutions appears to have been deliberate in order to conceal the WFTU sponsorship of the proposed meeting. By avoiding being identified overtly as the organizer of the conference, the WFTU hoped to give the impression that it was a "spontaneous" meeting, so as to attract as many delegates as possible from organizations not affiliated with the WFTU.

As initially planned by the WFTU, the conference was to be held in early March either in Paris or Berlin. A group of factory workers in West Germany was to initiate the event by applying to other firms in other countries, whereupon a joint initiative committee would be set up which would then address an appeal to all of the workers of Europe. It would then communicate with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions, and the WFTU asking for material help in the organization of the conference. The WFTU would then assent.

This plan of the WFTU was exposed, however, by the Austrian Socialist newspaper Arbeiter Zeitung on 16 January 1955, when it published a letter sent by Nils ELISON, an official of WFTU Headquarters in Vienna, to Communist functionaries in the Scandinavian countries. In this letter ELISON outlined the WFTU maneuvers in connection with the proposed conference.

Possibly as a result of this exposure, the conference was not held in March as originally planned.

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The idea of holding a European conference, however, was not abandoned. On 12-13 March 1955, a group of trade unionists from France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Italy met in East Berlin and decided to call a European Workers' Conference to be held in Leipzig, 22-24 April 1955. The meeting also elected a Preparatory Committee composed of the following persons:

France: Rene GAMELIN, steel worker at Lesquin
Edmond DELOOR, steel worker at Lesquin

Czechoslovakia: Sylvester POLEDNIK, Mir Coalmine, Ostrava

Poland: Karol WADULA, Peko Steelworks, Stalinograd

Germany: Joseph LENZ, Hannibal Coalmine, Bochum
Rudolf FRIEDRICH, Kirov Works, Leipzig

Sweden: Folke PERSSON, railwayman, Stockholm
Ivar LINDH, Eriksberg Shipyards, Goteborg

Denmark: Svend NIELSEN, Burmeister and Wain Shipyards, Copenhagen.
Herkuf HANSEN, Baker, Copenhagen.

Austria: Franz STEFAN (also reported as STAPHANE), miner, Knappenberg.

Italy: Arsenio PATERLINI, Mason, Reggio Emilia
Romolo MI MI, Giatto e Guanteri (radio cabinet plant), Florence.
Francesco SERAFIN, Vittorio Veneto

Following the meeting, the Organizing Committee issued an appeal addressed to the workers of Europe, pertinent extracts of which follows:

"The essential cause of your difficulties is the dangerous policy of international capitalism. War budgets are becoming heavier and heavier. The armaments race is being speeded up. New attacks are made against your wages, your social gains and your trade union and democratic rights.

"Many proposals have been made by the peace forces of the world to bring about a lessening of tension by negotiation. But against this, efforts are being made to have the Paris treaties ratified, which would increase the danger of war and close the door to negotiations....

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"The same danger threatens us all. We all pay the cost of war..."

"But there is one force strong enough to avert the danger - the force of the united workers of all countries, the strength of the workers of Europe!"

"Confident that we are interpreting your desires, we have decided to organize at Leipzig from the 22nd to the 24th April 1955 a Conference of the workers and trade unionists of all points of view from all the countries of Europe. This will be a Conference against the revival of German militarism, for the defense of the conditions and rights of the workers, for happiness and friendship among the peoples and for peace."

"Make this Appeal known everywhere, Organize meetings to discuss the Conference in your place of work. Elect your delegates. Collect funds for their travelling expenses..."

The conference took place as scheduled and, according to the Communist press, was attended by 1002 delegates from 25 countries. The only item on the agenda was: "The joint struggle of the working people of Europe and their trade unions against the restoration of German militarism and against the preparation of atomic war, for the defense of the living and working conditions of the working people, for prosperity and collective security, and for international friendship and peace."

One of the first acts of the conference was to elect a presidium, among whom were the following:

Louis SAILLANT (France), Secretary General of the WFTU.

**Herbert WARNKE (Germany), Vice President of the WFTU,
President of the FDBG.**

**Ivan GOROSHKIN (USSR), a Secretary of the All-Union Central
Council of Trade Unions.**

**Viktor KLOSIEWICZ (Poland), Member of the Executive Committee
of the WFTU and Chairman of the Central Council of Polish Trade
Unions.**

**Sylvester POLEDNIK (Czechoslovakia), member of the Preparatory
Committee**

**Rene DELOOR (France), member of the Preparatory Committee.
A Secretary of the Force Ouvriere.**

LICCARDI, not otherwise identified.

According to the Communist press, other members of the presidium included representatives from Italy, Norway, Belgium, Scotland, Luxembourg, Hungary, Spain, Bulgaria, Rumania, Cyprus, Denmark, Sweden, Greece, The Netherlands, Finland, and Switzerland. The names of these additional members of the presidium were not disclosed, however.

A Secretariat was also elected consisting of the following:

Helmut KOPETZ (E. Germany)
Jack HILL (Great Britain)
ANTOINE, fnu. (France)
CASADEI, fnu. (Italy) (Presumably Giuseppe CASADEI)
OLIMPIADA, fnu (USSR) (Possibly Boris OLYMPIADI)
An unnamed Swedish delegate.

Numerous speeches were made during the course of the conference. The general tenor of the speeches reported was that the revival of German militarism, and the inclusion of West Germany into "aggressive military blocs" of the Western powers as a result of the Paris Agreements, created a threat to the peace-loving people, not only in Europe, but throughout the world. By intensifying the arms drive, the "imperialists" were causing a further worsening in living conditions, and increasing exploitation in enterprises of capitalist countries.

In emphasizing the serious danger which the ratification of the Paris Agreements constitutes to the cause of peace and to the situation of the working class, the participants in the conference expressed the conviction that only the road of unity of action of the working class leads to a lasting peace, and that as far as this problem is concerned, there are no differences of opinion between the members of various trade union organizations, irrespective of their opinions and their affiliation to central international trade union organizations.

Viktor KLOBIEWICZ, leader of the Polish delegation, proposed that the conference should issue an appeal for a joint conference of all central trade union organizations and of leaders of all individual trade unions of Europe, irrespective of their political affiliations. This conference should work out an agreed basis from which to conduct the struggle against West German rearmament, weapons of mass destruction and the decline in the living standard of workers.

The Soviet delegate, Ivan GOROSHKIN, supported the proposals and an appeal to be issued to the international trade union organizations to meet immediately.

Louis SAILLANT, Secretary General of the WFTU, stated that the WFTU Executive Bureau, at its meeting on 10 May 1955 (Moscow), would closely examine the proposal made at the conference concerning a meeting of the three international trade union organizations. SAILLANT later added: "Why should not the national trade union councils of all countries meet at a world trade union conference with a single point on its agenda:

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The contribution of trade unions of all countries to organizing peace and security throughout the world?" SAILLANT also emphasized that even the WFTU, for all its tremendous power, was unable by itself to eliminate the danger of threatening atomic war. For that reason, cooperation between the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, and the WFTU -- was indispensable.

Other speakers at the conference included the following:

Rene GAMELIN (France)
Herbert WARKE (E. Germany)
BULKBACHER, inn (Austria)
LIU Chang-sheng (China), a Secretary of the WFTU. Attended as an observer.
Stelios MANDRIOTES (Cyprus)
Federico ROSSI (Italy), Deputy Secretary of the CGIL.
Renato BITOSHI (Italy), Senator and a secretary of the CGIL.
(Spoke at a rally held in conjunction with the conference.)
Dave MICHAELSON (Great Britain), London
Thomas YOUNG (Scotland), Glasgow Rolls Royce works.
Rene DESGRANDES (France), Worker-priest from Lyons area
Alain LE LEAP (France), WFTU Vice President.
Armand MAGNEN (Switzerland), Geneva
Paolo PARODI (Italy), Genoa docker.
MORTENSSON, inn. (Sweden)
RASMUSSEN, inn. (Denmark)
Arvo HAUTELA (Finland)
Luis CARRI (Spanish exile)
FUSE, Helgore (Japan), Chairman of the Building Workers' Union.
BLAYENOV, or BLAZHENOV, V. G. (USSR), Deputy of the Supreme Soviet, Stalin Prize winner.
Ion DOBRE (Rumania), Secretary of the Central Council of Trade Unions.
Marek KRINIZ (Hungary)
Mladen IVANOV (Bulgaria)

On the last day of the conference an appeal addressed to the working men and women of Europe was adopted. In the appeal it was stated that the ratification of the Paris Agreements created a very dangerous situation for European security and world peace. The arms race and inflated military budgets (arising from the Paris Agreements) would result in more excessive exploitation in capitalist enterprises and more numerous and more brutal attacks upon trade union and democratic rights. For this reason, the working men and women of Europe were urged to unite to prevent the implementation of the Paris Agreements, and to strengthen the bonds of the workers' national and international solidarity.

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An exchange of delegations was called for, and more numerous contacts between working people at all levels was urged.

The appeal also urged support of the international campaign for the collection of signatures against the preparation of an atomic war.

The conference also adopted an open letter to the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, and to the WFTU, which stated the following:

"Colleagues, we who are sending this letter to you have been delegated by millions of working men and women of 25 nations to the conference of the working people and trade unions of the countries of Europe which met in Leipzig on 22-24 April.

"... Unanimously we have decided to make ourselves the spokesmen for the concern felt by European working people in view of the current international situation, a concern also expressed at our conference.

"The ratification of the Paris treaties has opened the way to the revival of German militarism.... It aggravates the danger of an atomic war threatening the entire world. Even now the arms race is being intensified, the war budgets become more oppressive, and the burden is shifted to the shoulders of the working people. Taxation increases, exploitation is stepped up, attacks upon the wages, social gains, and the trade union and democratic rights of the working masses are becoming increasingly numerous...

"We therefore address ourselves to you, the trade unions, whose task it is to defend all this. We are profoundly convinced that the international trade union centers and the organizations affiliated with them can promote a powerful wave of unity and action among the workers and decisively contribute to averting the Paris treaties, which peoples reject, as well as an atomic massacre, if they unite their efforts for the preservation of peace. This is also the conviction of millions of European working people.

"We propose therefore that your representatives meet without delay and consider jointly how to ward off the misery and the disaster which threatens the working masses... They expect from you, their trade union organizations, decisive aid in this struggle.

"They will not understand it if you close your minds to their appeal...

"We request you to send your reply to the organization committee of the Leipzig conference at Number 28, Naumberger Strasse, Leipzig W."

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The WFTU has appealed to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions to join with it in the development of "united action" on a number of occasions in the past, but was unsuccessful in each instance.

The Leipzig conference appears to have been simply a different approach to the same objective. By concealing its sponsorship of the conference, the WFTU apparently hoped to convey the impression that it was the rank and file of the European working masses, rather than the WFTU, that was demanding the holding of a joint meeting of the three international trade union organizations.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions are not likely to be deceived by this maneuver.

Needless to say, the Executive Bureau of the WFTU, which met in Moscow on 10 May 1955, decided to accept the proposal of the Leipzig conference that it meet with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions.

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